

# BIRD COMMITTEE FIELD TRIP—1975

As Reported By Mr D. Jennings, Acting Committee Secretary

Members of the Bird Committee of the Western Australian Wildlife Authority met at Lake Toolibin on 17th November, 1975 at the start of a three day survey of lakes in the Arthur River and Beaufort River flats. They also planned to meet representatives of various sporting associations in the area so that a clearer understanding of field problems could be gained, and to hear submissions from the shooters regarding the 1975/76 duck shooting season.

A campsite was established on John Knox's property to the south-east of Toolibin, alongside the Reserve boundary. The Conservator of Wildlife, Mr. H. B. Shugg, led the party, which consisted of Dr. S. Davies, Dr. T. Riggert, Messrs T. Spence, J. Masters, N. Beeck, H. Hall, S. Bowler, D. Arnold and D. Jennings. Wildlife Officers D. Noble and K. Morrison with Technical Officer D. Munro joined Committee members for the survey. Well-known conservationist and wildlife photographer R. Garstone was also a welcome addition to the camping party.

The main emphasis of the survey was Lake Toolibin itself, a lake which had been closed to duck shooting during the 1974/75 season. Those Committee members who had not previously been to the area were given the opportunity to see at first-hand the special qualities which Toolibin possessed.

Following lunch on the first day, members took to the canoes hired for the survey so that a thorough inspection of the lake could be made. This proved to be an upsetting experience for Messrs Shugg and Spence—clothes may be dried, but binoculars tend not to work so well after a dunking. Not to be outdone, Messrs Garstone and Morrison duplicated the feat on the following morning. Morrison was heard to report that the water only came up to his navel, though he was standing on his head at the time. A sense of balance appeared to be a prerequisite for staying above water level. Despite such incidents, the canoes proved their worth once skill in manoeuvring in the strong wind had been acquired.



Committee members and representatives of various sporting associations inspecting a reserve.



Canoeists setting out for survey of Lake Toolibin.

After tea, a bird count revealed that 81 species had been sighted on the Reserve with 20 of these species nesting in the area. Apart from the Freckled Duck, much interest was aroused because of the nesting sites of the White Egret (*Egretta alba*) and the Little Grebe (*Podiceps novaehollandiae*). The lake was confirmed as one of the few known nesting sites of the White Egret south of the Kimberleys.

Early morning saw the canoeists out on the lake again, followed by a most informal Bird Committee meeting on the sand ridge south-east of the lake. Various aspects of the duck shooting season were discussed and a number of recommendations made.

The importance of Lake Toolibin was highlighted by the findings of the survey. It remains the one freshwater lake for at least 30 miles in any direction and, therefore, the only lake in the vicinity on which the Freckled Duck was likely to nest. The White Egret and Little Grebe nestings added weight to the argument for continued closure of the lake to duck shooting. Also, the situation of Lake Toolibin in the lake chain made it ideal as a refuge area, in keeping with Departmental policy that at least one lake in each chain should be set aside as a refuge area. Toolibin is the first major lake in this chain, and is thus the first to fill after rains.

Chef Sam Bowler prepared an early lunch after the meeting, to allow a full afternoon of lake inspections. The fact that some of the campers were ill after returning home was definitely not due to "Sam-onella" infections. Camp was broken just after lunch and the party set out via Mud Hut (Walbyring), Lake Taarblin, Nomans Lake, White Lake and Little White Lake before settling in at Narrogin for the night. From the inspections, it appeared that the water levels in most lakes were down 2 to 3 feet from the high-water marks evident on trees bordering the lakes.

That night, the Committee members met with representatives of the Narrogin Clay Target Association (Inc.), the Field and Game Association, and other shooters

from the Narrogin area. Unfortunately, Mr. Peter Jones, the Minister for Fisheries and Wildlife was grounded in Perth by the fuel crisis and was unable to attend as planned. Comments and suggestions were later passed to the Minister for his consideration and information.

The Committee re-convened the following morning to consider the suggestions of the Associations' representatives. The recommendations for submission to the Minister were added to those made on the shores of Toolibin.

Tracks were then made to Wagin, east to the small lakes leading in to Gundaring, then to Gundaring itself, thence to Wagin Lake where lunch was devoured alongside the Rubbish Dump Reserve. Lake Parkeryerring was next on the list, followed by a quick dash across to Beaufort Bridge to keep a rendezvous with the Hon. T. Perry, M.L.C. and a party of shooters from the Beaufort River area.

The whole company travelled to Reserve 5456 to inspect its two lakes and to discuss the possibility of opening the lakes to shooting now that they were under Departmental control. It was agreed that such a recommendation be submitted to the Minister, who has since agreed to the request.

Everyone was told to watch their step, as quite a few Tiger snakes had been sighted on previous days. Extra

adrenalin pulsing through the system improved eyesight quite remarkably.

Mr. Perry and some of the shooters then accompanied the party for a look at Lake Towerinning, where the group broke up and all headed for home.

Appreciation is expressed to all those who added their particular talents and abilities which helped make the trip a success. The many suggestions that this sort of field survey should be made more than 'just a once-in-a-while effort' are being given serious consideration.



Nesting site on Lake Toolibin